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TAGS: PHUM PGOV RP

SUBJECT: SENIOR PHILIPPINE OFFICIALS ON EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In an October 11 meeting with Ambassador and DCM, Foreign Secretary Romulo and National Security Advisor Gonzales expressed concern over the impact of extrajudicial (or "unexplained") killings both on domestic stability and on the Philippines' international image. They reiterated the government's determination to deal effectively with this problem, and highlighted the ongoing work of the Melo Commission appointed by the President and the Philippine National Police's Task Force Usig. (Septel will report on updates from these groups.) Ambassador emphasized the importance of bringing perpetrators of such killings to justice quickly and fairly in order to restore confidence in the police and armed forces, as well as in the judicial system. Gonzales expressed full agreement, and explained how the Melo Commission was now reaching out to the provincial and local level, while Romulo noted the importance of publicizing these efforts in order to convince more witnesses to offer information.

¶2. (C) Gonzales admitted that some members of the police or military may have been involved in some cases, but cited the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army (CPP/NPA) and organized crime as other likely culprits. He commented that the CPP/NPA, as well as opposition Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson, may well find the current concern over extrajudicial killings a useful way further to destabilize the government, and claimed that they might be increasing the pace of these killings in a new attempt to destabilize the government. He said he would focus intelligence collection efforts more productively on these targets, plus on certain local mayors and police chiefs who may also be involved. He said the Cabinet had discussed these killings at its October 10 session, with Gonzales warning that investigations might ultimately link killings to GRP officials, possibly including generals. He said that President Arroyo made clear to her Cabinet that anyone responsible must be brought to justice, no matter his/her position. Gonzales said the GRP would act according to the President's instruction.

¶3. (C) Gonzales pointed out that PNP investigative skills were weak, and raised the possibility of assistance from the FBI. Ambassador and DCM described our active training programs, including FBI, DOJ, State/ATA, State, INL, ILEA, and the new assignment of a Senior Law Enforcement Advisor. They cited U.S. technical assistance provided in the drafting of an Executive Order mandating police/prosecutor cooperation, which was awaiting a Presidential signature. Gonzales promised to push this Executive Order forward to the President for signature, and requested continued dialogue on other ways to strengthen police capabilities to investigate perpetrators of these killings. Ambassador said she would consult with the Mission's Law Enforcement Working Group and be back in touch.

KENNEY